

# RELIGION OF VEDANTA.

BY

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(of India).

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“Vedanta is the most sublime of all philosophies and the most comforting of all religions.”—Prof. MAX MÜLLER.

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VEDANTA is a philosophy and a religion. As a philosophy it inculcates the highest truths that have been discovered by the greatest philosophers and the most advanced thinkers of all ages and all countries. From the time of Socrates and Plato down to the time of Kant, Schopenhauer and Ralph Waldo Emerson the history of Western philosophy has not given to the world any truths or principles higher, more universal or more practical than those which we find in the teachings of Vedanta. The principles of this philosophy can be carried into practice in the daily life of every individual. Unlike other philosophies, Vedanta does not deal with mere speculations. It is the best friend in time of distress, it is most comforting in sorrow, and it uplifts the soul above all the trouble, anxiety and worry which may arise from failure in business or from other causes. There is no other philosophy in the world

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which teaches so perfect a method to gain self-control, peace and happiness as Vedanta. The earnest and sincere students have verified this in their daily lives; it may therefore be said that as a philosophy the teachings of Vedanta are most practical and helpful as well as sublime.

As a religion, again, Vedanta is unique and universal. It claims to supply the spiritual needs of all classes of people in all climes and all ages. Although it is not confined by any particular creed or sectarian doctrine, still it never denounces the creed of any religion and never destroys the faith of any sectarian. Nor does it prescribe one particular form of worship, ritual or ceremony for all classes of people. It gives absolute freedom to its students to choose any path, whether dualistic, ritualistic, qualified non-dualistic or monistic with all their phases and differences. The one peculiarity of the religion of Vedanta is that as, on the one hand, it encourages those who do not care for any ritual, ceremonial, symbol or other external forms of worship, so, on the other, it provides all forms, rituals, ceremonies and symbols for those who need them and find them helpful at the time of devotional exercises. If a devotee gains help through prayers, Vedanta tells him to pray, yet it does not maintain that prayer is the only form of worship for all. If any student finds help from such symbols as altar, incense, candles, flowers, Vedanta does not discourage him, but on the contrary it explains the spiritual meaning of such symbols, tells



him how to use them and shows him the way to reach the ultimate goal of all religions by the path of devotion and love.

Some cannot concentrate their minds upon abstract ideals, cannot worship the Absolute Spirit except through concrete forms and symbols. It is perfectly natural because our minds receive deeper impressions from concrete tangible objects. Any system of religion which discourages this class of people is as one-sided and imperfect as that religion which forces everybody to accept one set of rituals, symbols or one particular form of worship, prayer or devotional exercise. The religion of Vedanta strikes the happy medium by dividing the devotees according to their tendencies, powers and capacities, and by giving to each that which is especially helpful for him in the path of spiritual progress. Those who have strong dislike for rituals and symbols can belong to the religion of Vedanta just in the same manner as those who accept rituals and perform devotional exercises. Those who are purely intellectual and philanthropic can through the teachings of Vedanta purify their intellect and devote their whole life to doing good to humanity. Those who are ritualistic will find in the universal religion of Vedanta ample opportunity to perform rituals and ceremonies, to use external symbols and different forms of worship to suit their natural tendencies. A true follower of this universal religion does not denounce any creed or sect, does not find fault with

sectarian doctrines and dogmas, but tolerates and accepts all forms of worship and of devotional exercises. He does not criticise others, but understands that what may be good for him may not be good for another, and what is helpful for others may not be helpful for him. The Vedanta religion stands like the house-mother of several children each of whom she feeds with that kind of food which he can easily digest, its fundamental principle being the universal acceptance of all sectarian and doctrinal varieties. Therefore it is ever ready to give to each of its followers the spiritual food suited to his tendency, power, taste and capacity.

Vedanta explains the spiritual meaning of the various symbols that are used at the time of worship. The altar, for instance, stands for the altar of the heart. This altar should be dedicated to the Supreme Spirit which is the Soul of our souls and whose nature is Absolute Existence, Intelligence and Bliss. To whom is the altar of the universal religion of Vedanta dedicated? To the self-effulgent light of the Sun of Infinite Wisdom which dispels the darkness of ignorance in the human heart, and whose name is the eternal word *Om*. It is not meant for any individual person, but for the Infinite Spirit which is the Source of all personal manifestations and Divine Incarnations. A worshipper of Christ should think of Christ upon this altar, a worshipper of Buddha or Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, Jehova or Allah should think of his Ideal as seated upon this



symbolic altar of the heart. In the same manner the worshipper of Sri Ramakrishna, or of the Divine Mother, or of the Supreme Spirit under any other name should place Him or Her upon the same altar. In every case, however, it should always be remembered that this altar stands as the symbol of the heart of the worshipper. Here it may be asked, Will this not create confusion? The answer according to Vedanta is "No." Because Vedanta teaches unity of Divinity under variety of names and forms. The same Eternal One is worshipped as Jehovah or Father in Heaven, as Ahura Mazda or Divine Mother, as Christ or Buddha, as Allah or Vishnu, as Krishna or Ramakrishna. These names and forms are merely the manifestations of the one nameless and formless Infinite Being to whom the Vedanta altar is dedicated. The Vedanta altar is absolutely unsectarian and universal. It is one, yet it stands for many—nay, for every individual heart.

The light of the candle is the symbol of the light of the intellect. It is the light of the pure intellect that reveals the spirit seated upon the altar of the heart. Purified heart and intellect must be united before spiritual realization is attained.

Flowers are symbolic of the good thoughts and pure feelings which should be offered to the Supreme Spirit. When fruits are offered, they stand for the fruits of our works.

First sit in silence before the altar until you realize the spiritual meaning of the symbols; then

place the flowers, light the candles, burn the incense and sit in meditation, closing your eyes. Think of the altar of the heart, dedicate it to the Supreme Spirit under any name or any form which appeals to you, offer the flowers of good thoughts and pure feelings to your chosen Ideal, and concentrating your mind upon that form, repeat the name mentally and commune in Spirit with the Divine Ideal through meditation. This is the pure and simple form of worship in spirit which the universal religion of Vedanta offers to all devotees of all sects and creeds. Here is the common, universal background of all forms of worship, whether Christian or Mohammedan, Hindu or Buddhist.

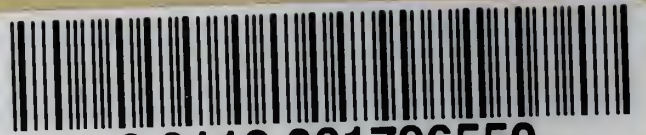
There are, it is true, some Protestant, Mohammedan and Hindu sects who object to external symbols, but they do accept the spiritual meaning of these symbols. No one has ever denied the worship of the Almighty Spirit upon the altar of the heart. All external worship is only preparatory to the internal worship by meditation which in turn culminates in Divine Communion and God-consciousness. Those who cannot meditate will find great help by starting with the beautiful symbol of the altar of the universal religion of Vedanta.

Meditation is the most important step in the path of spiritual progress. In this age of commercialism and materialism when everybody is mad after worldly pleasures and material prosperity, the followers of Vedanta should make it a point to spend



at least half an hour every day in feeding the soul with the nectar of Divine Communion which can be acquired through meditation. No spiritual enlightenment or realization has ever come to anyone without meditation. All the great spiritual leaders like Christ, Buddha, Krishna, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna advocated and practised meditation. In fact, through meditation they reached Divine Communion, God-consciousness and ultimately became the Saviours of mankind. Therefore in the religion of Vedanta meditation is so strongly emphasized. The worship of the Supreme is impossible without meditation, but the method of meditation may vary according to the nature and tendency of the individual.

Daily meditation should be practised in a quiet place which is kept free from all worldly thoughts and gossip and where there are such pictures as will rouse the devotional feelings in the heart of the devotee. Those who can afford it, should set apart a room in their home for this purpose and should never allow the atmosphere of the room to be impressed by impure thoughts or worldly ideas. It should be considered as a private household chapel. The effect of meditation in such a room will be wonderfully uplifting. When the mind is disturbed by passion, anxiety, worry or worldly trouble or sorrow, if the devotee go and sit there for a few minutes, he will surely obtain peace, comfort, happiness and the blessing of the Omnipresent



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Divinity. Those who cannot have a private meditation room in their own house, those who have no privacy or quietness in their lodging rooms, should come to the Vedanta Society House and sit in silence in its beautiful Meditation Room.

It has always been our desire to have a separate Meditation Room in the Society House. Our long-standing desire is now fulfilled by the will of the Almighty and to-day the Vedanta Society is able to open its Meditation Room to all sincere and earnest students and members who wish to make spiritual progress through the path of meditation.

This room is open to the followers of all sects and denominations, whether Christian or Mohammedan, Buddhist or Hindu, whether ritualistic or non-ritualistic. Every earnest student of Vedanta ought to congratulate himself or herself on having the privilege of belonging to the universal religion which has an absolutely unsectarian place of worship and an altar dedicated to the Universal Being with many names and forms.

May He who is Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, Jehovah of the Jews, Father in Heaven of the Christians, Allah of the Mohammedans, Buddha of the Buddhists, Krishna, Divine Mother and Brahman of the Hindus grant peace and blessings unto all the followers of the universal religion of Vedanta.

*(Extract from address delivered at the consecration of the Meditation Room in the Vedanta Society Headquarters.)*

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